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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY COMPLETES INTERIM RECORD OF DECISION FOR HANFORD BURIAL GROUNDS ALONG THE COLUMBIA RIVER

In late September, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) signed an Interim Record of Decision (ROD) stating DOE will clean up contaminated soil, structures and debris from 45 burial grounds along the Columbia River.

Materials excavated from the burial grounds - near former plutonium production reactors in Hanford's 100 Area by the Columbia River - will be disposed of in the Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility in Hanford's Central Plateau. Excavated areas will be filled with clean material, followed by revegetation. The estimated $400 million cleanup - the present value cost - will take approximately 10 years to complete, and does not include groundwater potentially contaminated by releases from the sites.

"This is the last interim ROD for Hanford's 100 Areas, and an important document for cleanup work along the Columbia River," said Beth Bilson, Assistant Manager for Environmental Restoration and Waste Management. "With the decision in place, we can complete soil remediation in the 100 Areas, bringing us a step closer to restoring the Columbia River corridor."

"This decision paves the way to complete all soil clean up in the 100 Area and fulfills the values set by the Future Sites Uses Working Group and the Hanford Advisory Board to allow for unrestricted surface use in the 100 Areas," said Dennis Faulk, EPA's 100 Area Project Manager.

The Hanford Site was listed on the National Priorities List (NPL) in 1989 as four sites - 100 Area, 200 Area, 300 Area, and 1100 Area - under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act. Each of these areas was further divided into operable units, or groupings of individual sites based on geographic area and common waste sources.

Site cleanup within the 100 Area is being accomplished through interim Records of Decision, which address liquids, soil, structures, and debris in various operable units. When clean up work is complete,

the Tri-Parties will generate a final 100 Area Record of Decision that will compile information and data resulting from the interim decisions, and potentially allow EPA to remove the 100 Area from the NPL.

Waste sites to be cleaned up in this interim ROD include:

- 100-BC-1 and 100-BC-2 operable units (11 burial grounds)
- 100-DR-1 and 100-DR-2 operable units (19 burial grounds)
- 100-FR-2 operable units (eight burial grounds)
- 100-HR-2 operable units (five burial grounds)
- 100-KR-2 operable units (two burial grounds)

Nine plutonium production reactors were built along the Columbia River in the 100 Area between 1943 and 1963. With the exception of N Reactor, reactor operations and associated waste and disposal practices were similar. Direct land burial in excavated trenches, or burial grounds was used to dispose of solid low-level radioactive materials.

When operations started, nearly all wastes were buried at the reactor areas where they were generated. Beginning in 1968, increasing amounts of wastes were transported to the Central Plateau for disposal and nearly all contaminated solid waste generated at Hanford has been stored or buried in the Central Plateau since 1973.

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Historical Note: The U.S. Department of Energy's Richland Operations Office manages the Hanford Site in southeastern Washington State. Hanford was established during World War II as part of the top secret Manhattan Project to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. Weapons material production was halted in the late 1980s. The Hanford Site is now engaged in the world's largest cleanup effort to deal with the legacy of radioactive and hazardous wastes that resulted from the plutonium production era. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Washington Department of Ecology regulate Hanford's cleanup program under a long-term compliance contract called the Tri-Party Agreement. This agreement sets the framework and timelines on the cleanup work so that Hanford meets environmental standards. Hanford cleanup is focused on three outcomes: restoring the Columbia River Corridor for other uses, transitioning the Central Plateau to long term waste treatment and storage, and preparing for the future.

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